

LEONARD MACKALL HOUSE  
Georgetown  
1686 Thirty-Fourth Street, Northwest  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS DC-835  
*DC, GEO, 238-*

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### LEONARD MACKALL HOUSE

HABS NO. DC-835

Location: 1686 Thirty-fourth Street, NW, Washington, D.C.  
(Note: the address was 3406 R Street, until 1971 when the Stevens family sold the frontage along R Street)

Present Owner: Mrs. Roger Stevens

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: The Leonard Mackall House derives its primary significance as a prominently sited Second Empire - style house incorporating a smaller, early nineteenth-century house. This house reflects the characteristic tension in Georgetown houses between the main north facade with front door and the rear south facade with the views of Georgetown harbor. The house is also an unusually dramatic demonstration of the extremes owners will go to make an older house much larger and of the current architectural fashion. Historical significance is derived from its prominent owners, such as the Mackalls who were an important late eighteenth- and nineteenth- century Georgetown family that owned several important properties, including Mackall Square (HABS No. DC-164), and the important twentieth-century theatrical producer Roger Stevens. A previous owner, Birne T. West, was also a prominent Georgetown resident, known for her garden, and civic activities, including historic preservation, in Georgetown. An obituary credited her with being a leader in getting legislation passed to save the Old Stone House on M Street.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Based on early nineteenth-century tax assessments it appears that the house was erected in 1818 or 1819. The 1813-1818 assessment and earlier ones, show the lots owned by R. Parrott and then Leonard Mackall, including the lot this house sits on, as being unimproved and worth \$150 each (there were seven lots). The 1818-1819 assessment describes the same parcels with the notations "vacant, \$2000." Unless a house had been built, the word "vacant" would not have been used and it is assumed that the description and value of \$2000 refer to one house, rather than the lots collectively. As no other houses appear on square 1294 (originally 124) on detailed maps done in the mid-nineteenth century and again at the end of the century, it is concluded that this house could have been the house valued at \$2000 in the 1818-1819 assessment.

2. Original and subsequent owners: The following chain of title includes lots 33-40, but the house was built on lot 37 and transactions include lot 37 unless otherwise noted.

1804 Deed (M44)  
John Davidson  
To  
John, Charles A., Thomas J. Beatty

1806 Deed of Trust (Q 383)  
John M., Charles A. Beatty  
To  
Anthony Reintzell, John Ott

1807 Deed (S 132)  
Anthony Reintzell, John Ott  
To  
Abner Ritchie

1810 Deed (Y282) Lot 35  
Abner Ritchie  
To  
Richard Parrott

1807 Deed (S 134)  
John Ott  
To  
George Bohrer

1807 Deed (S 135)  
George Bohrer  
To  
Anthony Reintzell

1808 Deed (T 162)  
Anthony Reintzell  
To  
Richard Parrott

1815 Deed (I 404)  
Richard Parrott, ux Jane  
To  
Leonard Mackall

- 1824 Deed of Trust (WB 13, 118)  
Leonard Mackall, ux Kitty  
To  
Helen M. Mackall
- 1836 Deed (WB 61, 470)  
James L. Gunnell, ux Helen (formerly Mackall)  
To  
Leonard Mackall
- 1867 Deed (ECE 12, 300)  
Richard L. Mackall, Robert M., Mary J., Charles Mackall, heirs of Richard Mackall, deceased  
To  
John G. Worthington, ux Elizabeth
- 1893 Quit Claim Deed (1855, 107)  
Charles Worthington, ux Rebecca F.  
To  
Elizabeth Worthington Philip (Note: John and Elizabeth Worthington died intestate; grant made to effect partition of estate)
- 1913 Deed (3642, 60)  
Elizabeth W. Philip  
To  
J. Van Ness Philip  
(Also H.H. Philip to John V.N. Philip {3749, 457} and Gaston Philip to H.H. Philip {3595, 2771})
- 1917 Deed (3952, 175)  
J. Van Ness Philip  
To  
Wm. T. Fitzgerald, Emma B. Fitzgerald
- 1917 Deed (January)  
Wm. Fitzgerlad, ux Emma  
To  
Clarence W. Colliere
- 1917 Deed (February)  
Clarence W. Colliere, ux Rita  
To  
Murray A. Cobb

- 1917 Deed (3961, 346)  
Murray A. Cobb, ux Carolyn H.  
To  
Helen A. de S. Canavarro
- 1921 Deed (4472, 219)  
Helen A. de S. Canavarro, et vir George  
To  
Birne T. West
- 1941 Deed (7639, 335)  
Birne T. West  
To  
Winifred B. Cumming
- 1970 Deed (May 8)  
Winifred B. Cumming  
To  
Roger Stevens

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: No information available.

4. Original plans and construction: No information available.

5. Alterations and additions: Within a year of buying the property the Stevens built the kitchen wing at the west end of the house, modified the front steps by adding a step and a ramp and removed the steps down from the side porch. The second floor of the wing is a bathroom and dressing room. The kitchen had originally been in the basement and food was brought up dumbwaiter, which was removed when the kitchen wing was built. At the opposite end of the house, along the east wall of the study, near the south end, a chair lift was added by cutting a square cutout in the ceiling and mounting the lift on wall-mounted tracks. When the lift is on the second floor, its platform covers the first floor ceiling cutout.

Sometime in the mid to late nineteenth century, substantial changes were made to the house. As the evidence is physical rather than archival, these changes will be discussed below in the sections describing the exterior and interior. Based on stylistic evidence the alterations were probably made in the late 1850s or more likely the late 1860s. In fact, the house was sold in 1867 and it is likely that the new owners made the changes within a few years of their purchase that altered the house to look Second Empire. The present configuration is shown on G. M. Hopkin's Survey of 1887 and S. Somervell Mackall's book published in 1899 has a photograph that confirms the configuration shown in the 1887 map, and shows that the house looked substantially as it does now.

B. Historical Context:

In *Early Days of Washington*, S. Somervell Mackall, writing in the late nineteenth century mentions not only several of her ancestors who were prominent in Georgetown affairs starting in the late eighteenth century, but she mentions at least three houses associated with her family. One is Mackall Square (HABS No. DC-164), another house appears to no longer be extant, and the third house is the Leonard Mackall House. Leonard's brother Benjamin built Mackall Square. The brothers married two daughters of Brooke Beall and, according to S. Somervell Mackall and other authors, he gave each daughter and son-in-law a double square as a wedding gift. One author wrote that Mackall Square was built on the inheritance of a daughter of Brooke Beall. More important than how the money conveyed to them is the brothers' choice of house sites. Each brother picked a high terrace, Benjamin well east of Wisconsin Avenue, actually closer to Rock Creek and Leonard just west of Wisconsin Avenue (then High Street), the major land route into and out of Georgetown. The south facade of each house offered commanding views of the Georgetown harbor. The south facade of Mackall Square is the house's major facade, with the front door centered on it. But at Leonard Mackall's house, the current front door faces north and the facade facing the harbor has two sets of French doors and a large porch. As Leonard Mackall's house was substantially enlarged and altered in the late nineteenth century, it is possible that during his occupancy the front facade might have been on the south. Major Georgetown houses of this period, such as Tudor Place (HABS No. DC-171), have the front door on the north facade, but have a substantial treatment (door, window or combination) on the south to take advantage of the harbor view, while other major houses such as Dumbarton Oaks (HABS No. DC-825) have the entrance on the south for the same reason. The desirability of the elevated house lot on Georgetown Heights or across Wisconsin Avenue is obvious, but what is unknown is why Leonard chose to be west of Wisconsin while his brother and many prominent early Georgetown merchants, real estate speculators, and better off federal government officials chose to build east of Wisconsin.

Like the Mackalls, the Worthingtons, a later owner of the house, was a distinguished and old Georgetown family. And like the Mackalls, the Worthingtons offsprings became doctors and Dr. N.W. Worthington was secretary of the national medical convention, which met in Washington, in 1840, according to S. Somervell Mackall.

A 1970 newspaper article describing the Stevens' acquisition of the property stated: "Roger Stevens, the millionaire producer and chairman of the Kennedy Center, has just bought one of the major residential properties in Georgetown... When entertaining on behalf of the arts the Stevens like to give big parties so (sic) may want to stretch their first floor of the six-bedroom abode ..." Stevens is best known for making the Kennedy Center into an internationally prominent performing arts complex.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Leonard Mackall was once most likely a typical late Federal period house, but in its present appearance it is classically Second Empire with a taller, slightly projecting center pavilion with wings to either side creating a symmetrical composition. The central pavilion and wings, but not the 1971 kitchen wing, culminate in a Mansard roof. Even the barely visible cupola is common to the Mansard or Second Empire Style.

2. Condition of fabric: The house and gardens are in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The center block is two and half stories with a basement and is 37 feet high, and three bays wide. The adjacent wings are two stories tall, approximately 30 feet tall, and one bay wide. The kitchen wing is two stories and approximately 21 feet tall, and one bay wide.

2. Foundations: Brick.

3. Walls: The main facade and the east wing have Flemish bond, the west wing is common bond, on the north facade. On the other facades, rows of headers are separated by seven rows of stretchers (as with the north facade of the west wing).

On the north side between the center section and its adjacent wings, there are cold joints, sealed with caulking, indicating that the center and wings were not built at the same time. Also on the south facade, the east wing projects slightly forward of the center wing, reinforcing the idea that they were not built at the same time. If they had been, the wing would have been recessed from the center section.

Further evidence that the main block and adjacent wings were not built at the same time is visible in the south facade of the east wing. A stone lintel, with wooden fascia in front, runs nearly the width of the bay. The space below the lintel has been bricked in recently, based on the appearance of the brick. Due to the lintel, this wing appears to be less residential and more barn-like. Neither in the Federal period nor in the Second Empire, would a wing of house, which balances another wing, be designed as a stable.

Based on the above exterior evidence there are several possible scenarios. It seems possible that the center wing was built first and perhaps dates to the early nineteenth century and then the two wings were added about 1867. But the wide opening on the south side of the east wing raises the possibility that it was built early perhaps as brick stable and later converted to part of the house. In this second scenario, the main block would have been built after the east wing, and the west wing would have been built sometime after the main block to give balance to the composition. Another possibility is that the main block was not built at one time. The thickness of the north wall of the double parlor suggests that it might have originally been an outside wall, and that the shell housing the entrance hall was built later. Perhaps the original,

Federal period house was the double parlor with an entrance porch on the north facade, and later that porch was removed and the front as expanded to its present width and depth. At that time a round arched front entrance was built, perhaps within ten years of the original construction. Subsequently the house was sold in 1867 and made into the contemporary style of Mansard, with the front door arched opening concealed behind the new door surround. Even with destructive testing and other means beyond the scope of the HABS documentation project might not be possible to arrive at a definitive chronology for the evolution of the house.

4. Structural system, framing: It is assumed that the system is heavy timber framing.

5. Porches, stoops: Porches exist on each facade. On the east wing, a porch runs the width of the wall and it appears to be late nineteenth century with scrollwork brackets on two columns, s-curve dentils supporting the cornice, and flat balusters with concave fillers between the balusters at the top and bottom rails. On the south facade, a two story porch runs across most of the center section, with stairs descending from the east side of the porch. The railings for the stairs have squat newel posts with chamfered corners, flat square caps, and squat, square in-plan balusters and a wide top rail. The porch on the west wing dates to 1971 and is simple and without artistic ambitions. The front porch, is a major design element, reinforcing the visual focus on the center of the main block. Paired square in-plan columns and pilasters, all with exaggerated capitols, support the porch with a deep cornice, supported in turn by consoles. The balustrade above the cornice, which appears in the late nineteenth-century photograph in Mackall's book has been removed. The columns and pilasters have block-like plinths, with recessed panels. This heaviness in detail is consistent with the front door surround. A balustrade composed of squat balusters with heavy top and bottom rails runs around the porch, except on the west side where a ramp for Mr. Stevens was inserted and on the front where the steps are. To either side of the steps, thin turned balusters support a light top rail and culminate in square in-plan newels, with caps, but otherwise undecorated. The difference in scale and ornamentation of the step balustrades from the rest of the porch suggests that the step balustrades are later and, perhaps, redone by the Stevens.<sup>1</sup>

6. Chimneys: Tall round arched, recessed paneled chimneys, with dentilled caps, with different height chimney pots, are in the west and east walls of the main block.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is a double door with each leaf having a square, raised lower panel and tall, round arched raised panel above it. Above the doors is a segmental arched transom, with deep paneled reveals. In front of these heavy doors is pair of thinner, weather doors with tall upper panel of horizontal louvers and the lower panel of vertical

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<sup>1</sup>The Stevens did, in fact, redo the steps in order to make them more accessible. Personal Communication, Mrs. Roger Stevens to Paul D. Dolinsky, August 2001.



louvers. Flat, undecorated pilasters flank the doors and at the top of the pilasters, ancons support the cornice of the door surround, which is further supported by four small consoles above the transom. The cornice of the door surround abuts the porch ceiling. The other notable doors are the nearly floor to ceiling French doors, with two light transoms opening onto the porch on the south facade. One of the two sets still has screen doors in front of the French doors, and both have shutters. The transom reveals are undecorated and the door surrounds have simple raised molding. The east porch also has two French doors opening onto it.

The current front door surround is not the original one as evidence of an earlier one is visible to the left of the east pilaster. The spring of an arch is evident. Whether that arch is the original Federal period opening or simply a later nineteenth-century alteration is unknown. It is assumed, based on style, that the current door surround dates to when the house was redone in the Second Empire Style, in approximately 1876.

b. Windows: On the north facade, there are two over two windows and two over four windows, all having stone sills and cast- iron hoods. The two over four windows flanking and above the front door are nearly floor to ceiling height. The windows on the south facade lack cast-iron hoods, instead having brick headers. The cast-iron hoods are repeated on the windows on the east and west facades, except at the basement level. All windows have shutters.

#### 8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The Mansard roofs of the main and flanking blocks are a major design element at the Leonard Mackall House. The use of hexagonal slate, with rows in different colors is characteristic of this style roof.

b. Cornice, eaves: A deep wooden cornice with closely set dentils runs across the main block as well as flanking blocks, helping to tie the three units together, while emphasizing their difference in height.

c. Dormers: The north and south facades each has two round arched dormers, with slightly projecting cornice. The windows in the dormers are two over two.

Atop the roof is a barely visible, hipped roofed cupola. A circular, louvered vent faces south on the rear roof.

#### C. Description of the Interior:

##### 1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: The basement is a maze of rooms under the first floor rooms and porches. Given the irregularity of the plan, it seems likely the spaces were either dug out in different periods or the spaces were partitioned into rooms at different times.

b. First floor: The front door opens onto a hall running nearly the length of the house. At the east end of this entrance hall are doors into the bathroom and into the study. Directly opposite and south of the front door are double doors into the double parlor. At the west end of the entrance hall are the stairs up to the second floor and under those stairs are those to the basement. At the top of the stairs to the basement is a door into the pantry. The entrance hall's west end also has a door into the dining room which is adjacent to and south of the pantry. The pantry, in addition to having a door into the dining room, also has a door into the kitchen. The entrance hall is not only the major circulation path, but the only one as there are no openings between the study and the adjacent double parlor nor between the double parlor and the adjacent dining room. At some earlier time, an opening between the study and the parlor was filled creating bookshelf alcove in the study and cabinets in the double parlor.

c. Second floor and attic not viewed.

2. Stairway: An open-string, open-well stairs climbs along the north side of the entrance hall, bisecting the window west of the front door. As the stairs turn, it creates a gracious curve above the entrance hall. With squat, octagonal newel post, correspondingly squat two balusters per tread, wide top rail, terminating in the circular caps of the newel post, the stairs are clearly mid to late nineteenth century. The newel posts illustrated in Calvert Vaux's *Villas and Cottages*, originally printed in 1864 (see page 99 in the 1970 Dover reprint) are closely related to the one on the first floor of the Leonard Mackall House ( and the basement newel post is a scaled down version of the first floor one). Like the other details of the stairs, the stringer is ornately typical of the mid to late nineteenth century, consisting of a incised triangle, with curved bottom cord, in the corner where the riser and tread intersect. The curved bottom cord curves under and back at the tread end and at the riser end it also curves back but with three branches, suggesting a vaguely naturalistic shape. It is assumed that this staircase dates to approximately 1867 when the house was sold and the new owners also added the Mansard roofs.

No secondary or servants stairs to the upper floors remain.

3. Flooring: In the east wing and the double parlor, the medium width floor boards run east -west. In the west wing, the flooring runs north -south. In the entrance hall, the flooring runs east-west in the eastern third of the space, and north-south in the remaining two-thirds. Also, in the double parlor, a wide plank runs north south from the threshold, dividing the room and floor in half. The inconsistency in the direction of the flooring and the extensive patching raise interesting questions about the evolution of the house, but do not as yet provide any answers.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are made of plaster. While the walls of the living room and the study have only been painted, those of the hall and dining room have been wallpapered. The baseboards are wooden, with curved molding at the top. There are no cornices.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front door surround detailing is limited to two groupings of half round molding. The molding is more robust than Federal period detailing, but not as pronounced as the newel posts and balustrade would lead one to expect. The door surround into the double parlor repeats the detailing of the front door, and has paneled reveals. The other doors between rooms have the same surrounds, but not as tall as the front door or double parlor doors. The French doors on the study and on the south wall of the double parlor are taller and those in the double parlor have more rows of half round molding, giving the French door surrounds a more robust profile, more in keeping with the stairs.

b. Windows: The window treatments are consistent with the door surrounds. An interesting feature of the windows is the fillet on the mullions.

6. Decorative features and trim: The study and dining room fireplaces are off white marble with incised spandrels flanking an ancon . The fireplaces sit on simple plinths. But in other details the two fireplaces differ. The dining room has an undulating mantel shelf, while the study's is straight across, the incision decoration is different, and more importantly the proportions differ. The study fireplace lacks the height and width of the dining room one. In each fireplace opening, there is a cast-iron arched surround. The double parlor has two rectangular opening fireplaces with veined marble facing. With the exception of raised molding suggesting plinth, astragal, and capital, the mantels are unornamented. Also unornamented is the straight across mantel shelf.

7. Hardware: Some lockboxes might be nineteenth century.

8. Mechanical systems: The first floor of the main block of the house is heated by iron radiators.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The parcel runs from Reservoir Road on the south nearly to R Street on the north, with the entire frontage along the west side of 34<sup>th</sup> Street from Reservoir to R Street. The west boundary is nearly half the width of the block. When the Stevens bought the house, the neighbors were relieved believing that the site would be preserved in whole, but the Steven sold off the parcels fronting on R Street, which have been developed with upscale brick rowhouses. The land slopes up from Reservoir Road to the house site. It is a gradual, but noticeable incline, affording good views south from the rear porches. The main facade faces north. A steep driveway approaches the house from the east on 34<sup>th</sup> Street. The south gardens had been famous earlier in this century and they still retain numerous bushes and plantings.

2. Historic landscape design: Unknown.

3. Outbuildings: At the southeast corner of the parcel a large rectangular, perhaps 1 ½ story stable stands. It sits slightly below the ground level of the parcel. The wooden double doors face 34<sup>th</sup> Street. A cupola sits atop the roof; there was once a weathervane gracing the cupola top, but the weathervane has been stolen.<sup>2</sup> Along the Reservoir Road boundary sits an ornamental brick pavilion.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Much of the information for this property was from the files of the Peabody Room of the Georgetown branch of the D.C. Public Library. Additional information was gathered at the Washingtoniana Room, Martin Luther King Branch of the D.C. Public Library, National Archives and the library of the Historical Society of Washington, specifically the S. Somervell Mackall book, *Early Days of Washington*, copyright 1899 by Mackall, printed by Neale Co. and Grace Dunlop Ecker's *A Portrait of Old Georgetown*, copyright 1951 by Ecker, printed by Dietz Press.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, April 2000

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller, architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrde, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.

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<sup>2</sup>Regarding the weathervane, Personal Communication, Mrs. Roger Stevens to Paul D. Dolinsky, August 2001.